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Although schools have increased influence over the social-psychological development of youth, they do not provide diversity in nonacademic domains. In addition, the apparent diversity among institutions is of little value because institutions are not located or administered in such a way that individuals can choose freely between them. Decentralization and equal access to every school might effectively alter the monolithic pattern of school organization. Another innovation, which would provide for dissenters from majority-dominated school policies, would be to establish scholarships for attendance at either neighboring public schools or at private schools. At the college level, universalization of higher education and the academic profession's increasing power over collegiate organization and standards are trends that threaten to eliminate diversity. Commuter colleges will increasingly replace residential ones, and all seem to be turning into PhD. preparatory institutions. Alternatives to the years of boredom in the classroom must be found in order to forestall the increasing alienation and anger of youth. (NH)

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THE URBAN SCHOOL CRISIS

An Anthology of Essays

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4 EDUCATION: CULTIVATING GREATER DIVERSITY

by Christopher Jencks

As always in the past, Americans expect their schools and colleges to do more than teach children to pass examinations; they expect them to give shape and direction to the lives of children and adolescents—and sometimes even adults.

A brief comment must be made about the "conservative" theorists who argue that American educators suffer from *hubris,* and that they should stop even trying to do tasks which can only be handled by the family, by employers, by churches or by other social institutions. In principle these critics are right. Schools and colleges are not ideal settings for growing up. By their very nature they tend to be impersonal, bureaucratic and hierarchial. They have to rely on words and numbers as a substitute for many kinds of experience, and they have to rely on large groups, in which children vastly outnumber adults, for most of their achievements. Nevertheless, inadequate as schools and colleges may be to meet the non-academic responsibilities thrust upon them, the fact that America has turned to educators for help testifies to the failure of other institutions to do what is necessary.

In a society changing as rapidly as ours, most parents lack the assurance to impose their own youthful standards of behavior on their children. So if schools and colleges sanction children spending large amounts of time without adult supervision, parents go along. If they accept cars and cigarettes as part of adolescent life, parents will usually do the same. If the school or college winks at sex and liquor, parents find it hard to exercise a veto. If it promotes athletic teams, fraternities and sororities, as neo-familial structures commanding passionate loyalties, parents cannot resist effectively and seldom try.

Nor is the helplessness of the typical parent confined to "discipline." It extends to affection and emotional support. A school-age child spends half his waking hours away from his parents in a setting where his age-mates outnumber adults 25:1. At school, he learns to rely on his classmates as the mirror in which he views himself. If he is successful by

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their standards he feels himself a king; if he is popular with them he accepts himself as a tolerable human being; if his impulses conform to the norms they establish, he yields to them and finds ways to get around any contradictory norms established by his elders. Parents sometimes deplore particular consequences of this "peer culture," but they normally accept its broad outlines. Twentieth Century parents are less and less likely to want their children to live within the bosom of the family, and many are alarmed by a child who tries. They want their children to establish close friendships with children of their own age, and many want children to be "popular" as well.

Staying in School

The inability of the family to cope with all the tasks traditionally assigned to it has been matched by employers' growing reluctance to undertake their traditional responsibilities. From 1880 to 1920 almost all children except those from the professional and managerial classes left school at 13 or 14. The daylight hours of adolescence were spent at work. The lower classes usually turned to unskilled work; the more fortunate found either blue collar or white collar "apprenticeships," which hopefully led to more skilled work and enabled employers to decide who was fit for greater responsibility. Between 1920 and 1940 the average school-leaving age rose very rapidly from about 14 to 18. Universal education through high school became the dominant American norm, and high schools took over certain kinds of vocational training. Still, many 18-year-olds were not ready for the kind of work they hoped to do as adults. Many employers still had to provide a good deal of training, as well as making provision for separating sheep from goats. In the past 10 years, however, employers have shown more and more reluctance to do this. In a glutted labor market they have avoided hiring workers under 21. And instead of taking on large numbers of young people, trying them out on various jobs, and giving them whatever training and responsibility they seemed able to cope with, more and more employers have left training and screening to the colleges. It has become harder and harder to get a job without higher education, and even if the non-college man gets an unskilled or semi-skilled job, there is not likely to be any machinery for helping him to work his way up through the ranks. Employers assume that those who have the appropriate academic credentials have not only technical skills but ambition, adaptability, ability to control their impulses, and a willingness to do others' work. To date, young people have been slow to respond to this change in employer expectations. The average school-leaving age has risen very slowly since 1940, and as a result teenage unemployment has steadily increased. Nevertheless, it seems safe to predict that by 1980 the school-leaving age will have climbed from 18 to 20 or 21.

The net result of these changes is that despite the protests of the conservatives, educational institutions have more and more influence over the social and psychological development of the young and over the kinds of adult lives the young seek and have an opportunity to lead. It is therefore hardly reassuring to discover that America offers the great majority of young people no choice whatever about the kind of school they

attend and very little about the kind of college. Economic and logistical pressures force nearly every young person into the nearest public institution.

Public school men admit this but argue that *within* most public institutions, be they elementary schools, comprehensive high schools, or local commuter colleges (which for reasons I will explain are the wave of the future in undergraduate education), there is enormous variety and a wide range of choice. If this is interpreted to mean *academic* variety and choice, there is some truth in it. But everything I have already said underlines the fact that the non-academic learning which takes place in school and college is at least as important as the academic. And in non-academic terms the internal diversity of public institutions, while not to be entirely ignored, is far from impressive. Of all the relationships which a man might have with colleagues, neighbors, friends, parents, children or government, how many are accepted as legitimate (much less desirable) by more than a handful of American educators? Of all the possible responses to youthful anxiety about popularity, intelligence, athletic ability and sexuality, how many varieties are sanctioned within any one American school or college? There are, of course, some differences *among* institutions—though far less than one might hope. But since these institutions are not located or administered in such a way that families can choose freely between them, their apparent diversity is of very little value to particular individuals. I will discuss this problem first at the elementary and secondary level, then at the college level.

Majority Rule

The lack of competition and choice in the public school system is not simply historical accident. The ideology of the public schools (and to a lesser extent the public colleges) is majoritarian; minorities are to be "assimilated" if they are ethnic, to be ignored if they are religious, to be distrusted if they are socio-economic. According to most public school spokesmen, every school should try to be "comprehensive," serving a cross-section of the American people. If the school succeeds in this, every child should be happy to attend it. The idea that special schools should be set up to cater to minority tastes within a school district is regarded as "undemocratic." The school, after all, is a melting pot, where we all learn to get along with one another, and the idiosyncracies which divide us are played down or rubbed out.

Decreed from on High

Parents have got around some of the limitations in this "cross-section" ideology by grouping themselves into comparatively homogeneous neighborhoods and then pressuring boards of education to organize the schools along neighborhood lines. This strategy is, however, only partially successful. Many parents, it is true, pick their housing with at least one eye on the character of the local schools, and these parents usually get what they want, or something near it. But not all parents have enough mobility, money or the right color of skin to move near the school of their choice. Furthermore, the present pattern of school administration limits the extent to which any neighborhood school can respond to the special character of its

clients. Many basic decisions about the schools (*e.g.*, who can teach) are made at the state level, and most others are made "across the board" by boards of education dealing with fairly heterogeneous districts. Individual schools have almost no autonomy.

Two general reforms seem in order. First, the idea that there is one best way to run a school should be abandoned; central control over school systems should be greatly reduced; and individual principals, PTA's, and even student government ought to be given more power. At the same time, school boards should abandon efforts to link school choice with where a family happens to live. Instead, families should be encouraged to shop around and send their children wherever they wish. *Every family should have equal access to every school; no family should be forced to send a child to a school it dislikes.* The result of these two related reforms could be a dramatic change in the monolithic pattern of school organization.

A Significant Choice

In the system I envisage, one principal might decide to run a Montessori school, drawing children from all over the city, while another might want to create a school which emphasized the Three R's and basic education. A third might combine classroom work with part-time employment, a fourth might be largely staffed with part-time "amateur" teachers who also held non-academic jobs. A fifth might try hiring fewer teachers and paying them more, while keeping the teaching load down by having the children spend more time in the library and less in class. Any number of variations can be imagined, and under such a system it would be comparatively easy to try them out. Some parents, of course, would dislike each innovation, and so would some students. But if the old concept of neighborhood schools were abandoned, the disgruntled could send their children elsewhere.

There are, I admit, a variety of administrative headaches in any such reform scheme. To begin with, it would require a more adequate transportation system than now exists in most areas, and it would not work at all in thinly settled parts of the country. Nevertheless, we are an increasingly mobile and urban people, and experience has shown that if schools are really distinctive, parents will send (or even take) their children miles to attend.

A second difficulty is that any such free choice system would give some schools too many applicants and others too few. In the long run the solution is to build extra classrooms in the popular schools. In the short run it is to admit those who most want to attend—first come, first served. This means establishing waiting lists and taking those who apply early.

Unpopular schools must also be dealt with. If money were allocated among schools on the basis of enrollment, unpopular schools would have plenty of incentive to change their ways. But if a poor location, a bad principal, poor teachers or a "bad image," kept enrollment substantially below capacity, a board of education mindful of its capital investment would eventually have to declare the experiment bankrupt. In some cases the school would have to be closed (*e.g.*, if it were in an area to which nobody would voluntarily send a child).

Bureaucratic Resistance

Another serious question is what the policy of a board of education should be with regard to schools which do not want to achieve distinctiveness by establishing a unique administrative or pedagogic system, but by restricting admission to certain kinds of applicants. Clearly a school which gives preference to whites, or Catholics, or the children of the well-to-do cannot be tolerated. But what about a school which is restricted to those with high IQ's? My own feeling is that the decision about who attends a particular school should be kept in the hands of students and parents, not testers, teachers or administrators. A school should be allowed to offer only college preparatory courses, but it should have to admit any student who wants to do the work.

The creation of a genuinely heterogeneous system of the kind I have described is not very likely, or at least not soon. Central educational bureaucracies and boards of education will not delegate much authority unless forced to do so, and there is very little pressure in this direction from the electorate. Most middle-class people find it easier to move to a better district than to organize politically, and in school politics the lower classes hardly count. As a result, most school systems will probably go on trying to find a middle-of-the-road policy acceptable to the majority of parents, and let the minorities go hang. Nevertheless, considering the enormous influence which schools can have on children, some provision, it seems to me, ought to be made for the dissenters.

More Public Private Schools

One solution would be to provide the malcontents with scholarships, tenable either in neighboring public school districts or any private school willing to open itself to all on the same basis as the local public schools. Such scholarships would, of course, be bitterly attacked by the public school men, both as being "undemocratic" and as an attempt to "destroy the public schools." Private schools are not, however, inherently undemocratic. It all depends on their admission policies. If parents want their children to attend, say, an extremely permissive Summerhill-type school and the public system provides nothing of the sort, what is undemocratic about setting up a private school? One might as well argue that it is undemocratic to build your own swimming pool if your home town doesn't have a public one. If a school is open to all, it is not undemocratic but simply different. And if competition from such private schools can destroy the public schools (which I doubt), then public schools do not deserve public support any more.

Close-to-Home College

When one turns to colleges, the need to promote competition and choice is less obvious. There is still considerable difference between one campus and the next. Furthermore, while both the machinery for informing students about collegiate possibilities and the scholarship funds available to help needy students go where they want are far from adequate, the situation is better than at the elementary and secondary level. Unless re-

medial action is taken, however, two current trends seem likely to eliminate most of this diversity in the next generation. The first trend is the universalization of higher education, which is leading to the concentration of most undergraduate training in cheap, public, locally-oriented commuter colleges. The second trend is the academic profession's increasing power over collegiate organization and standards, a trend that promises to eliminate most of the diversity of residential colleges.

What lies ahead for higher education may be imagined from observing Calfiornia, where two-thirds of the younger generation is already entering college. Faced with demand of this magnitude, the California legislature has authorized huge state university campuses in every major center of population. Seven of these institutions are now being created. They will cater largely to graduate students and to undergraduates whose ability and interests are likely to lead to graduate school. Most students who want a terminal BA (or even in some cases an MA) will attend one of 16 state colleges. Those who want either a two-year vocational training program, or two more years of general education before transferring to a state college or university, will turn to one of more than 70 public junior colleges. This three-tier system ensures that 95 percent of all California households are within commuting distance of some kind of public college. The social atmosphere in these institutions varies according to their tier, but as between one junior college and another, or one state college and another, there is seldom more social or psychological variation than between one comprehensive suburban high school and another. Nevertheless, since these public colleges are vitrually free, and since the state makes only token efforts to provide financial help for students who want to live away from home or to attend a private college, the great majority of California youngsters have no choice but to attend the nearest public institution. Since the forces which have created this pattern in California are now at work everywhere else in the country, and the California example is being consciously or unconsciously emulated, what is true today for California will probably be true tomorrow for America.

The Norm of Excellence

I am not suggesting that the residential undergraduate college is about to become extinct. The very bright will continue to get scholarships, and indeed the number of scholarships will grow, though probably less rapidly than the number of needy college applicants. Family incomes will also continue to rise, and this will enable more families to send their children away to college if they want to. Some families, moreover, will make heroic sacrifices to send their children to church colleges, often because they dislike the semi-permissive ethos which dominates most public commuter colleges.

Yet unless state and federal governments reverse the trend of recent years and provide support to individual students to go wherever they want, the residential college may become increasingly atypical. And, even if residential colleges flourish, those who attend them will have less and less chance of finding a campus which deviates in any important respects from the norms of the academic profession—norms which are almost uni-

form across the country. Boards of trustees and college administrators are more and more committed to something vaguely defined as "academic excellence," and this leads them to hire teachers who have published articles in scholarly journals, or failing that, have at least earned PhD's at a university which employs such scholars. In order to attract and retain such teachers most colleges have had to abandon the distinctive social purposes for which they were founded.

The PhD Fetish

One college after another has been, or is about to be, made over into a juvenile version of graduate school. Nine times out of ten, I admit, the new version of undergraduate education is better suited then the old to the world for which students are now headed. But it is not always suited to the world from which the students come, or the world which they would like to help create. Even those who are happy to see old-style colleges transformed often wish they were being replaced by more than cram courses for proto-PhD's.

The only solution I can see—and it is far from adequate—would be for more colleges to recruit professors from outside the standard academic disciplines. At the very least, this would mean that the faculty had more diverse standards of success for its charges than is now the case —refusing to get a PhD would not be a sign of failure. It might also breathe some new life into the often arid internal bickering of certain academic disciplines.

Considering all the forces working against diversity and choice within our system of schools and colleges, might we not also be wise to consider seriously some of the non-academic routes to the adult world?

Years of Boredom

For those who believe, as most educators do, that academic achievement is of enormous importance for "later life" (as well as being good in itself), all efforts to create alternatives to the classroom will seem deplorable. As every commencement orator notes, "There is so much to learn and so little time to learn it." But even the most casual observation of American adolescents, either in secondary school or college, reveals that what most lack is not time but interest. For most people, the classroom is a very poor way to learn. They are passive and bored. The teacher talks, they hardly listen. If they don't understand, they can only interrupt at the cost of disrupting the whole class, annoying not only the teacher but their classmates. It is all contrived and unreal—even worse than a "teaching machine." The prospect that every American will soon spend half his waking hours in such settings up to the age of 21 is hardly reassuring, nor is it likely to sit very well with the young. Unless we invent alternatives, both within the established system of formal education and outside, the society of the future will have to cope with a steady increase in youthful alienation and anger.